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UNCLAS LAGOS 000631

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: PETROLEUM TRUCK DRIVERS COMMENCE STRIKE

1. Summary: On April 26 long-distance petroleum truck drivers in Lagos began an "indefinite strike," protesting the Lagos State Government's seizure of some of their trucks which truckers normally parked alongside major roads overnight. The Lagos Government says it will not negotiate with the drivers until they comply with traffic regulations and relocate to alternative parking lots. The strike has resulted in long queues at gas filling stations and brisk business for black market fuel hawkers. End Summary

2. The Lagos State zonal council of the Association of Petroleum Tanker drivers directed its members on April 26 to stop lifting petroleum products until the Lagos State government released forty trucks seized for violating traffic regulations. Razak Akanbi, the association's treasurer, told PolSpec the state government of Lagos was wholly responsible for this strike action, accusing the government of reneging on promises to provide alternative parking for the truckers.

3. The Lagos Government has, however, vowed not to release the trucks until relevant fines are paid and warned more impoundments were in the offing as part of the state's efforts to ease traffic congestion. Lagos Commissioner for Transportation characterized the government's decision as irreversible. "We want to solve this problem once and for all", he said. He said the government hopes to weather the labor action by providing incentives to strike-breakers. Drivers who do not participate in the strike will be provided police escorts, for example.

4. COMMENT: The dispute between the Lagos government and petroleum truck drivers has antecedents. In November 2002, the state impounded sixty-five illegally parked trucks. The drivers retaliated with a strike, resulting in significant fuel shortages. The truck drivers who routinely park their large haulers on major roads and bridges causing serious traffic delays claim they have no alternative parking space; the Lagos Government disputes the claim. While both sides exchange recriminations, long queues build at Lagos gas stations. A protracted strike would have a serious impact on the local economy; but this is only day two of the strike and neither side appears ready to concede. Meanwhile, business has never been better for black market fuel hawkers. END COMMENT

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